474 As a result of the growth of collectivization and the M.T.S., the need for human labour decreased; and the entire process of production was reduced to about half the number of work days required on individual farms. By the end of the second Five Year Plan (1938) there were 242,392 collective farms in the Soviet Union; 9,665 of them were located in Byelorussia. Altogether they cultivated 85 per cent. of the total area sown in the U.S.S.R. and produced the bulk of the grain, cotton, sugar, flax, and other raw materials required for the population, industry, and export. At the same time, the individual plots which the kolkhoz members were permitted to keep were furnishing a large part of the berries, fruit, and vegetables which appeared in the city markets.

There were two principal ways in which collective farms delivered agricultural products to the government: through payments in kind to the M.T.S. and the flour mills; and through direct sales of a certain quota. Whatever remained after the fulfilment of the quota, the collectives could distribute among their members.

As has been said, the Byelorussian Republic by 1938 had 9,665 collective farms, which in that year cultivated 2.8 million of the 3.3 million hectares sown in the Republic. That is, Byelorussian kolkhozes were responsible for tilling nearly 85 per cent. of the cultivated area of the Republic in 1938, while the machine and tractor stations were serving nearly 87 per cent. of the total crop area, not only the collectives, but some individual farms as well.[1] In the B.S.S.R. the number of M.T.S. had steadily increased from 63 in 1932 to 200 by 1937, and just before the German attack in June 1941 there were 342 machine and tractor stations in the Republic. The increase after 1937 was largely due to the growth of mechanization in Western Byelorussia, where under the Soviet system more than 100 of these stations were organized. (See next section.) 2/A

407 A large number of machines was available in the Republic before the war, both in the M.T.S. and on individual farms. From 1932 to 1937 the number of tractors in the B.S.S.R. grew from 3,200 to 8,100; and by June 1941 the Republic had 12,000 tractors. In 1932 there had been only four harvesting combines in operation in Byelorussia; by the end of 1937 the number had risen to 674; and in June 1941 the Republic had 1,500 combines and 2,300 threshers at work. In addition to tractors and combines, trucks have also played an important part in the mechanization of Byelorussian agriculture. By 1938 the Republic possessed 4,237 trucks for farm purposes; and their total carrying capacity was reckoned at 7,600 tons. (Compare 195,800 trucks in the U.S.S.R. as a whole, with 352,100 tons carrying capacity.) At the

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1 According to a recent statement by the Byelorussian Minister of Agriculture, work on the cropland "before the war" was 60 per cent. mechanized. This lower percentage is explained by the fact that up to June 1941 Western Byelorussia was still in process of mechanization, and far behind other regions of the B.S.S.R.

2/A [See cat 116, pp 26-27 -- Analyst]

407 outbreak of the German attack, it was estimated that the R.S.S.R had 12,000 tractors, 1,500 combine harvesters, and 20,000 other agricultural machines.

Agricultural Development of Western Byelorussia

241 311 The arable area of the Byelorussian Republic was increased by about 3,587,000 hectares in 1939, when Western Byelorussia was rejoined to the Soviet Union. According to the Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland, London, 1941, this territory in 1938 had 136,000 hectares under cultivation of wheat, 1,132,000 hectares under rye, 664,000 hectares under oats and barley, 518,000 under potatoes, and 60,000 hectares sown to flax.

241 423 Before the incorporation of the western territory into the R.S.S.R., its agriculture was primitive. Eighty to 90 per cent. of the population were engaged in agricultural work, and there was practically no mechanization. After 1939, however, many changes were made. The People's Assembly of Western Byelorussia declared all land, timber, and water resources to be the property of the state, (that is, public property);; and subsequently, 646,000 hectares of land were distributed among the poorer peasants, as well as 540,000 hectares taken from large estates and given to poor and middle-class farmers and to formerly landless hired men. Fourteen thousand hired men and poor peasants also received horses, and 33,400 households received cows.

474 [475] Many of the farmholdings were then organized into collectives; about 1,000 kolkhozes were formed in a short time, and over 100 machine and tractor stations erected. In 1940 these west Byelorussian M.T.S. had 1,500 tractors at their disposal - about 15 per cent. of all the tractors held by the M.T.S. of the Republic.

[727] The process of collectivization in Western Byelorussia was interrupted by the German occupation, which destroyed the Soviet system of land utilization, and at present the work of reorganization is not moving along very rapidly. By 1946 only about 100 collective farms, combining 2,802 individual holdings, had been reorganized and were again functioning; and this is but a small fraction of the peasant population in the western region. However, government officials state that no immediate pressure is being exerted to promote collective farms.

German Devastation of Agriculture

727 241 The German occupation from June 1941 until the summer of 1944 left Byelorussian agriculture exhausted and devastated. The enemy had destroyed 9,200 villages and more than 1,200,000 peasant holdings. Ninety-two state farms and about 10,000 collective farms had been plundered and destroyed. All the food processing plants had been blown up; and over 316 machine and tractor stations had suffered destruction and looting; from them the Republic lost 8,996 tractors, 1,105 harvester combines, and countless numbers of other agricultural machines which the Germans either wrecked or carried off to Germany.

433 and the restoration of this crop is important not only to provide fibre
246 for the linen industry, but also to supply linseed oil, which is then further refined to produce edible oil, supplementing animal fats in the diet.

Clovers are especially needed to plant alternately in the areas where flax is grown. Both clover and timothy seed production were lost during the war. The improvement of these crops would do much to assist the rehabilitation of decimated and under-sized livestock herds. Plans have been made to reach a self-sustaining level of vegetable seed production by the spring of 1948. Adapted and satisfactory varieties of UNRRA seed are being used as parent stock.

Fertilizers

433 Fertilizers are an urgent requirement, as the low fertility of Byelorussian soil necessitates using large quantities both of manure and of chemicals. All are in extremely short supply. The fertilizer available in 1946 was only 15 per cent. of pre-war. The Byelorussian Minister of Agriculture estimated that in 1946 only 25 to 30,000 tons of potash were used, as compared with 160,000 tons before the war. As an example, one collective farm in the Polotsk oblast used before the war about 600,000 tons of fertilizers, but had only 500 tons in 1946.

In view of the shortage of manure and of the naturally slow progress in restoration of the soil-fertilizing grass and leguminous crops, large-scale measures are being taken in the B.S.S.R. to utilize peat as a fertilizer; the plan for 1947 is to use over 5 million tons.

Drainage Projects

312 Before the war Byelorussia was executing a plan for the ultimate drainage and reclamation of four million hectares of swamp land. Progress had been made by 1941 to the extent of reclaiming and planting 270,000 hectares. During the war the drainage system deteriorated, and in some places was deliberately destroyed to flood areas for defence purposes. Trench-digging and dredging machinery was removed by the Germans. Work on the restoration of the drainage canals began shortly after liberation; 25,000 hectares of drained land were restored to cultivation in 1945, and it was expected to restore an additional 33,000 hectares in 1946.

Farm Machinery

407 Farm machinery was, and is, badly depleted. In 1946 only three to five per cent. of the seeding of crops was done by machines; and tractors ploughed only about 20 to 25 per cent. of the cropland. The number of tractors available in 1946 was 25 to 30 per cent. of pre-war; but most of the machines were in bad condition, having been patched together from spare parts. It was hoped that UNRRA would be able to make early deliveries of tractors to the B.S.S.R.; but despite the urgency of the need, the Administration was not able to supply any

407 tractors in time for either the spring or the autumn ploughing season in 1946. The first shipment of UNRRA tractors arrived in the Republic in December. Altogether, UNRRA expects to deliver about 800 tractors. The Byelorussian Minister of Agriculture gave the Mission an estimate that 20,000 15-horsepower tractor units would be needed to reorganize farm work on an adequate level of mechanization.[1]

In speaking of the need for farm machinery in this Republic, the UNRRA Mission said: "It is important to recognize that Byelorussian farming is not a hand-tool agriculture. Rehabilitation and recovery here does not mean a better hoe - it means a better tractor. It means more combine threshers, more grain drills and mechanized equipment. Rehabilitation of agriculture here means re-establishment of the pre-war rate of mechanization of farms, which, in turn, will release labour for still more tractor factories and still more industrialization. Byelorussian farmers spaded by hand 200,000 hectares (half a million acres) in 1945 and half that amount in 1946. Such labours do great credit to the industry of the farmers, but a hungry Byelorussia and a hungry world will not be fed by such primitive farming methods."

Farm Buildings

727 362 By the end of 1946 enough housing had been repaired or built in the B.S.S.R. to enable 250,000 families (about 1.5 million people) to move from dugouts or caves into houses. Rural schools had also been transferred from dugouts to new premises. The Byelorussian newspaper Sovietskaya Byelorussia (issues of December 17 and 24, 1946) reported that 254,000 houses had been restored in rural areas since liberation. Eighty-two thousand had been rebuilt in 1944, 112,000 in 1945, and 60,000 in 1946, and 45,556 houses were still in process of construction. As at the end of 1946, 10,000 rural families (50,000 people) were still living in dugouts and caves.

Farm Manpower

464 Besides the deplorable housing situation, which contributes to lowered work efficiency, there is a great shortage of labour. Since the war it is women rather than men who constitute the main labour force on Byelorussian farms. UNRRA Mission observations in mid-1946 gave a ratio of four to six women to every man. In some sections, 80 to 90 per cent. of the workers were women. On one farm visited the labour force consisted of five men, 75 women, and 21 young boys and girls. A total of 43 men from this one farm had been killed during the war.

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1 The 15-horsepower unit is the common method of computing tractor numbers. Most Soviet tractors are larger than 15-horsepower, but a 45-horsepower machine would be considered, for example, an equivalent to three tractor units. An editorial in Sovietskaya Byelorussia, Minsk, January 8, 1947, stated that the average output per 15-horsepower tractor in 1946 was 338 hectares of ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and threshing, which is 73 hectares higher than the average for 1945.